

NEWS RELEASE

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YAMPA RIVER PLAYS IMPORTANT ROLE IN RECOVERY OF ENDANGERED FISH

GRAND JUNCTION, Colo. – Biologists from the Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Colorado State University are continuing to conduct experimental nonnative fish management research studies in the Yampa River. They are working with the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program (Recovery Program) to determine if efforts to manage northern pike and smallmouth bass will reduce their predation on endangered and other native fishes. These nonnative fish species pose one of the primary threats to the recovery of the endangered humpback chub, bonytail, Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker.

Smallmouth bass removal will occur in 39 of 90 river miles between Craig and Dinosaur National Monument. This represents an increase of 22 river miles over last year.

“The additional miles are needed to isolate a section of river where researchers can conduct a study to determine if mechanical removal can be an effective tool to manage the abundance of smallmouth bass,” said Recovery Program Nonnative Fish Coordinator Pat Nelson. “Our attempts to do this last year were hampered by large numbers of smallmouth bass moving into the study area from upstream. The extra river miles should provide a ‘buffer zone’ that will prevent that from happening this year.”

Smallmouth bass that are 10 inches or greater in length will be removed from the Yampa River and relocated to local ponds or reservoirs to provide fishing opportunities.

Last year, smallmouth bass removed from the Yampa River were placed in Elkhead Reservoir.

“Relocation of fish to Elkhead Reservoir wasn’t a feasible option this year due to the ongoing construction that is taking place to expand the reservoir,” said DOW Assistant Regional Manager Steve Yamashita. “Our plan is to resume relocation to this lake in 2007 once construction is completed and the reservoir reopens for public use.”

Northern pike removal in the Yampa River will also take place. Some fish will be collected for a CDOW stable isotope study to determine their origin. Most fish will be relocated to Yampa State Wildlife Area and Loudy-Simpson ponds near Hayden and Craig.

The CDOW and the Recovery Program are making plans to host a meeting in the Craig area in late July or early August to present an update to the community about the Recovery Program and to answer questions.

The Yampa River is considered one of the most important tributaries in the Upper Colorado River Basin for recovery of the four endangered fish species. This is primarily due to its relatively unaltered patterns of seasonal flows and habitat which are important to the endangered fishes' life cycle. In addition to providing habitat, the Yampa River delivers flows and sediment downstream to the Green River, helping to maintain a river system with hundreds of miles of critical habitat.